



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



LEMME RECOGNIZED FOR HIS LEADERSHIP IN ASSISTING VETERANS

SDDVA's Jerry Lemme was recognized last week during State Employee Recognition Day. This recognition represents outstanding public servants that work every day to improve the quality of life for the citizens of South Dakota. Jerry has been serving the State of South Dakota for over 25 years. He worked full time for the South Dakota Air National Guard in security forces where he retired in 2015. He began his career with the Department as claims examiner and currently serves as a state veterans service officer in our Sioux Falls office.

Jerry's attention to detail and ability to research VA laws and regulations makes him a valuable subject matter expert to the department.

Jerry is a great mentor to his peers. He is the one they often lean to for advice on claims. He ensures to not only give them the right answer, but also explains why and where to find it so they can remember it.



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

| | |
|--|----|
| Kokesh Bridge Dedication | 2 |
| SDDVA Offers New Site for Visits | 3 |
| Vet Center Training | 3 |
| Busse Bridge Dedication | 4 |
| We are not Invisible Campaign ... | 5 |
| VA Caregiver Program Expands .. | 6 |
| VanZanten Competes | 7 |
| VA Letter Writing Campaign | 8 |
| Education Benefits | 9 |
| USD Veterans Legal Seminar..... | 12 |
| Upcoming Events..... | 13 |

KOKESH BRIDGE DEDICATED



Saturday, October 3, friends and family members of SGT Allan Kokesh, Jr., gathered in Yankton for the dedication of the SGT Allen D. Kokesh Jr. bridge.

The east bound James River Bridge on HWY 50 was dedicated to SGT Allen D. Kokesh, Jr., of Yankton, who died on February 7, 2006, from wounds sustained in combat on December 4, 2005, following a detonation of a roadside bomb in Baghdad. Kokesh was serving with Battery C, 1st Battalion, 147th Field Artillery unit based out of Yankton.

SDDVA Secretary Greg Whitlock and Field Service Officer Brett Dickerson shared in the dedication ceremony, along with Yankton County VSO Mike McDonald.

"Allen paid the terrible costs for our freedoms when he died while serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom."

said Whitlock. "He fought not for fame or recognition, but because it was the right thing to do. It is our sacred duty to keep his legacy fresh in the memories of future generations, for his service is the cornerstone of our great nation."



SDDVA OFFERS NEW LOCATION FOR VETERANS TO MEET WITH STAFF

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs has setup a temporary office to meet with veterans to file their claims and conduct in-person interviews.

Due to Federal COVID-19 guidelines, our offices in the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Regional Office on the VA campus have been closed to the public.

The SDDVA temporary office is located in the South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance building at 1600 W. Russell Street in Sioux Falls.

The Department will have state veterans service officers available for walk-in appointments Monday through Friday from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm (CT). Currently, we are located in the window office at the back of the Patriot Grill on the ground floor.

Veterans needing assistance with their claims or have questions regarding their benefits are encouraged to call our Sioux Falls claims office (605.333.6869).



FINANCIAL PEACE-MILITARY EDITION

The Sioux Falls Vet Center is hosting a "Financial Peace-Military Edition" training program to assist veterans and service members to develop and implement financial tools to improve skills on managing money.

The telehealth training will be held on Tuesdays from October 20—December 15, from 10:00 am to 12:00 noon (CT).

If you have questions regarding the training, please have them call the Sioux Falls Vet Center (605.330.4552).

SD BRIDGE TO BE DEDICATED IN HONOR OF SGT DANIEL BUSSE

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs will be hosting a State Bridge Dedication Ceremony to honor Combat Veteran SGT Daniel Busse.

The ceremony will be held Wednesday, October 14, 2020, at 1:30 pm (CT) in the east wing of the Highmore Auditorium at 415 Iowa Avenue South in Highmore.

The HWY 14 Bridge near Harrold will be dedicated to U.S. Army SGT Daniel Busse, of Highmore, who died in hostile gunfire on September 1, 1968, while serving in South Vietnam Quang Ngai (province).

Naming bridges in honor of our combat veterans who died while serving their country is a new initiative of Governor Kristi Noem and the South Dakota Departments of Military, Transportation, and Veterans Affairs.

"Whenever and wherever this nation has called, in times of darkness and danger, as well as in times of peace and prosperity, veterans have been there and have proudly carried the torch of liberty for all to see," said Greg Whitlock, secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs.

"Our fallen heroes are no longer with us, but their memories live on in the hearts of their loved ones and our state," said Whitlock.

"Naming our South Dakota bridges in honor of our fallen will give us an opportunity of remembrance, reflection, and respect—for honoring the men and women who gave their lives in service to this nation. They cherished liberty and loved freedom enough to lay down their lives to preserve our way of life."



WE ARE NOT INVISIBLE



There are roughly two-million living women veterans, and many VA Central Office employees who are women veterans.

In celebration of Women's History Month, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has created a [virtual exhibit](#) that shows employees who are women veterans. By spotlighting the many faces of this diverse and important segment of the veteran community, I Am Not Invisible (IANI) aims to increase awareness and dialogue about women veterans, as well as open viewers' eyes to the myriad levels of expertise of veterans serving veter-



ans. Click here to view the [South Dakota IANI campaign](#).

Some of our South Dakota female veterans featured in the exhibit are: SDDVA Program Manager Erin Brown, VA Staffers Erin Bultje and Michelle Henderson and Lake County VSO Courtney Van Zanten. Collec-



tively these veterans served over 21 years in the United States Army and Air Force and have elected to continue their service to this great country by assisting veterans and their families.



VA PROGRAM OF COMPREHENSIVE ASSISTANCE FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS EXPANDS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced implementation of a new information technology (IT) system marking the official launch of the first phase of expansion of the [Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers \(PCAFC\)](#) to caregivers of eligible Veterans of earlier eras.

The Caregiver Records Management Application (CARMA) automates manual processes and integrates with other VA systems, resulting in increased efficiencies and effectiveness for VA staff.

The expansion rolls out in two phases. Effective Oct. 1, the first phase includes eligible veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty on or before May 7, 1975. Effective Oct. 1, 2022, the second phase will include eligible veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty between May 7, 1975 and Sept. 11, 2001.

Through CARMA, with a click of a button, an electronic health record will be created for a family caregiver where Caregiver Support Coordinators will document their clinical interactions. CARMA will also help guide consistency by systematically adjusting the VA's stipend payment calculations, as appropriate, and alerting VA users when annual reassessments of PCAFC participants are due, among other key functionalities. In addition, this program expansion also includes a new digital version of the application which allows individuals to apply for the PCAFC online.

"Caregivers provide stability and security to our most vulnerable veterans, allowing them to stay in their homes with their loved ones for as long as possible," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "This begins the first phase of expansion of the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. Through this expansion, the VA is able to give more family caregivers access to essential resources so we can support them as they care for veterans of earlier eras."

Since [publishing the final regulation](#) July 31, to improve and expand PCAFC — VA also expedited hiring key staff who bring the clinical qualifications and organizational skill sets to ensure consistent eligibility decision making across the enterprise, support program needs and provide strong infrastructure for consistent and standardized application processing and adjudication.

(continued on next page)



CAREGIVER PROGRAM EXPANDS (CONTINUED)

This past year, the Caregiver Support Program expanded to approximately 1,100 staff and will grow to approximately 1,800 staff within the next six months. These changes ensure veterans and caregivers receive timely, accurate assessments and eligibility determinations, as well as an improved customer experience.

Previously only available for eligible Veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty on or after Sept. 11, 2001, PCAFC provides education, support, a monthly stipend, health care coverage and certain beneficiary travel to qualifying family caregivers of eligible Veterans.

VA's Caregiver Support Program offers a wide variety of support services for caregivers of veterans. Partnerships continue to be created or enhanced to broaden services and supports for caregivers. Learn more by visiting the Caregiver Support Program [website](#) or by calling the Caregiver Support Line at 855-260-3274 for more information.



**PCAFC expansion
Enters Phase 1**

VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers is Expanding... Are You Eligible?

[Learn more »](#)

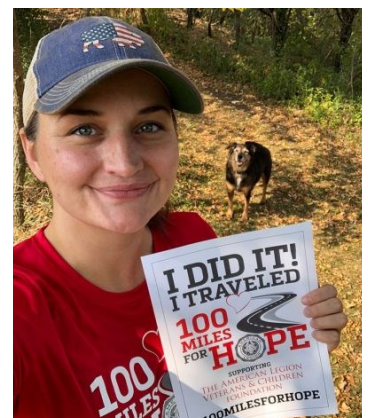
<https://www.caregiver.va.gov/>

VANZANTEN COMPLETES 100-MILE CHALLENGE

Courtney VanZanten, veterans service officer for the Department of South Dakota American Legion and Lake County, has completed the American Legion 100-Miles for Hope challenge.

"Walking 100 miles pushed me to be outside in nature, away from the computer and phone screens," said VanZanten.

The 100 Miles for Hope campaign is a way for American Legion Family members to raise donations for the Veterans and Children Foundation, as well as encouraging members to stay active in this time of social distancing. There is still time to register for the 100 Miles for Hope challenge. [Sign up here.](#)



VA LAUNCHES PROGRAM TO SEND CARING LETTERS TO 90,000 VETERANS

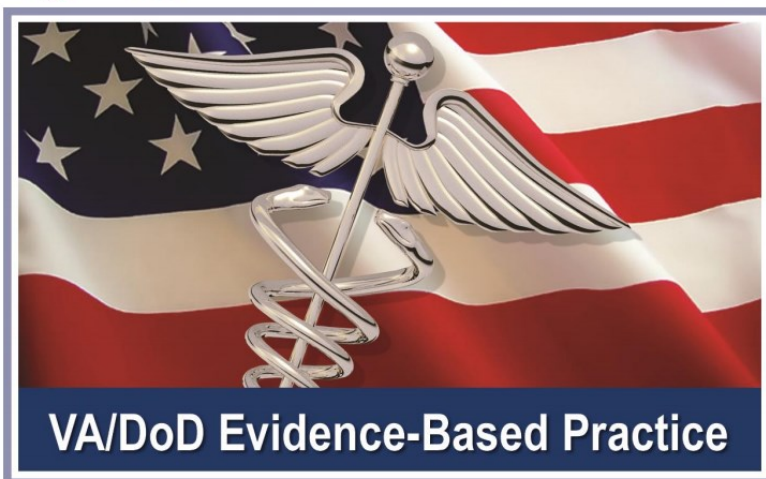
The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced its [Veterans Crisis Line](#) (VCL) formally launched the Caring Letters Program, an evidence-based suicide prevention intervention that involves sending periodic messages with simple expressions of care and concern to Veterans who use VA health care and contact the VCL.

The program aligns with the [2019 VA/DOD Clinical Practice Guidelines](#), which suggests brief, nondemanding follow-up communication keeps Veterans engaged and could facilitate opportunities for connecting them with treatment options.

“In the first 11 weeks of the program VCL has mailed Caring Letters to almost 19,000 Veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This is one of the largest caring letters programs ever implemented. We’re planning to send letters to over 90,000 Veterans over a 12-month period of time.”



THE ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF PATIENTS AT RISK FOR SUICIDE



Provider Summary

[Research](#) has found caring letters can reduce the rate of suicide and suicide behaviors for individuals receiving them. Caring letters are thought to reduce suicide by promoting a feeling of caring connection and reminding Veterans that help is available if they need it.

Learn more about [VA’s suicide prevention resources and programs](#).

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, contact the Veterans Crisis Line to receive free, confidential support and crisis intervention available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Call **1-800-273-8255** and **Press 1**, text 838255 or chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](#).

An American flag is draped over a rustic wooden surface. The stars and stripes are clearly visible, and the flag is slightly crumpled, giving it a sense of being handled or laid out.

How to use your GI Bill® in South Dakota

On-the-Job or Apprenticeship Training

- Veterans can draw their GI Bill® while training for their job.
- Need to be a full-time, permanent employee.
- Need to have GI Bill® eligibility.
- Employer will have to fill out an application with training outline and wage schedule.
- Application goes to SD State Approving Agency in Pierre then to VA for approval.
- Training programs can be 6-48 months long depending on job duties.
- Trainees will have to track their progress and submit their hours to VA each month.
- All chapters (1606, 30, 33, and 35) can be used for this program.
- Each program has a certifying official to verify hours and training.
- https://www.benefits.va.gov/GIBILL/docs/factsheets/OJT_program_approval.pdf
- <https://benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/education/OJT.pdf>





How to use your GI Bill® in South Dakota

School (click on the links below to find out more about each of these items)

[Undergraduate and graduate degrees](#)

[Tuition Assistance Top-Up](#)

[Tutorial Assistance](#)

[Vocational/technical training and non-college degree programs](#)

[Veterans technology education courses \(VET TEC\)](#)

[Entrepreneurship training](#)

[Flight training](#)

[Test fees](#)

[Independent and distance learning](#)

Transfer to spouse or dependent

You may be able to transfer education benefits if you're on active duty or in the Selected Reserve and you meet the following requirements.

All of these must be true:

You've completed at least six years of service on the date your request is approved, and

You agree to add four more years of service, and

The person getting benefits has enrolled in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS).

https://benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/education/Post-911_Transferability.pdf





How to use your GI Bill® in South Dakota

Who's covered?

Qualified dependents

These conditions apply to family members using transferred benefits:

Spouses

- May use the benefit right away
- May use the benefit while you're on active duty or after you've separated from service
- Don't qualify for the monthly housing allowance while you're on active duty
- May use the benefit for up to 15 years after your separation from active duty

Children

- May start to use the benefit only after you've finished at least 10 years of service
- May use the benefit while you're on active duty or after you've separated from service
- May not use the benefit until they've gotten a high school diploma (or equivalency certificate), or have reached 18 years of age
- Qualify for the monthly housing allowance even when you're on active duty
- Don't have to use the benefit within 15 years after your separation from active duty, but can't use the benefit after they've turned 26 years old.

VA Form 22-1990 – application for GI Bill eligibility

School questions – contact Shane Olivier at 605-773-3648 (shane.olivier@state.sd.us)

OJT/APP questions – contact Ryan Fowler at 605-773-3565 (ryan.fowler@state.sd.us)

For more information on education benefits, please visit: <https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/>

For handouts and forms, please visit: https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/handouts_forms.asp

Free Virtual Legal Clinic



JOIN US ON ZOOM:

November 13 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

To reserve an hour time slot please contact the University of South Dakota Knudson School of Law Veterans Legal Education Group via phone or email.

Phone: 605-658-3530

Email: vleg@usd.edu

The Veterans Legal Education Group and the South Dakota Low Income Taxpayer Clinic are hosting a FREE VIRTUAL LEGAL CLINIC. Legal professionals, along with student attorneys, will be available to address and support the military community and their families with any legal questions and needs.

FREE FOR ALL SERVICE MEMBERS, THEIR FAMILIES, AND VETERANS!

EVENT CONTACT:

USD Knudson School of Law
Veterans Legal Education Group

Phone: 605-658-3530

Email: VLEG@usd.edu

SUPPORTED BY:

State Bar of South Dakota
and
Veterans Committee and Young
Lawyers Section

UPCOMING EVENTS

Oct 14—SGT Daniel Busse Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—Highmore High School Auditorium—1:30 pm (CT)
Oct 17—Gallantly Forward 2020 Gala—Rushmore Plaza Civic Center—Rapid City—5:00 pm (MT)
Oct 21—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Sioux Falls
Nov 11—SSG Jason W. Montefering and SGT Jeremiah Boehmer Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—Parkston High School Auditorium—9:00 am (CT)
Nov 13—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)
Nov 13—Virtual Legal Clinic—9:00 am—5:00 pm
Dec 1—Governor’s State of the Budget Address—1:00 pm (CT)
Jan 12—Governor’s State of the State Address—1:00 pm (CT)
Jan 13—SDDVA/SD Veterans Council Legislative Reception



Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer
South Dakota Department of the Military <https://military.sd.gov/default.html>
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov>
Soldiers and Sailors Building - 425 E Capitol Avenue
Pierre, SD 57501
Phone: 605-773-8242
E-mail address: audry.ricketts@state.sd.us

